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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [TW](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: PRO-REFORM BLOGGER DESCRIBES PRC DEMOCRACY GROUPS,
CLAIMS EARLY TAIWAN DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT INSPIRES CHARTER 08

REF: A. 08 BEIJING 4522
[1](#)B. 08 BEIJING 4493
[1](#)C. 08 BEIJING 4670

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The main model for the December-released "Charter 08" manifesto calling for democratic reforms in China (ref B) was "Formosa Magazine," the former journal of the Taiwan democratic opposition, according to well-known Chinese liberal blogger and media commentator Zhao Jin (aka "Michael Anti," strictly protect). Formosa Magazine, which in 1979 played an important role in the Taiwan democracy movement, was reportedly seen by many Charter 08 drafters as a means of organizing politically, rather than simply a statement of ideals. Zhao described to us what he sees as the three main pro-democracy groups in China: "techies," "dissident writers," and "journalists" working for Southern Daily Group, the envelope-pushing media entity run by the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee. It was the "dissident writers" group led by the now detained Liu Xiaobo that was primarily responsible for Charter 08, Zhao said. End Summary.

Charter 08: Inspiration from Taiwan?

[1](#)2. (C) The main model for the democratic reform manifesto "Charter 08" issued December 9 (ref B) was "Formosa Magazine," the former journal of the Taiwan democratic opposition, not Czechoslovakia's "Charter 77," well-known liberal blogger and media commentator Zhao Jin (aka "Michael Anti," strictly protect) claimed in a January 14 conversation with PolOff. (Note: Formosa Magazine was founded in Taiwan in 1979 and served to organize pro-democracy activists at a time when new political parties were banned. Its original leaders reportedly included Annette Lu, who later became a prominent Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) politician and Taiwan Vice President from 2000-[1](#)2008. The magazine is famous for organizing a Human Rights Day rally on December 10, 1979, in Kaohsiung that sparked a crackdown by Taiwan (KMT) authorities.)

[1](#)3. (C) Zhao said he had spoken recently with a number of Charter 08 drafters who favorably view Formosa Magazine as a model for creating a literary and intellectual movement with practical political implications. Formosa Magazine, Zhao stated, eventually led to the creation of a political organization with chapters across Taiwan that played an important role in the Taiwan democracy movement. Although some in China might hope to imitate Formosa Magazine, Zhao conceded that the current political

situation on the Mainland would not allow the Charter to be as influential. Taiwan in the late 1970s had far more freedom of speech than Mainland China did now, Zhao noted.

Liberals vs. Dissidents

14. (C) Commenting on the state of the pro-democracy activist community in China, Zhao said understanding where "the line" is between "liberal advocacy" and "dissent" was critical to survival in China. Zhao defined "liberals," including himself, as people who "know where 'the line' is precisely" and "work within it to democratize and reform China." Dissidents, on the other hand, "cross the line" and "get hurt." Zhao said that he had occasionally crossed the line, but believed he "can do more good as a liberal" and thus avoided becoming too outspoken against the Communist Party. Dissidents were necessary for the existence of liberals because they "push the line back" and thus made liberals "safer," Zhao asserted. Dissidents, however, ultimately had less influence over Chinese society because the Party severely restricted their ability to publish and move freely, Zhao said.

15. (C) Zhao argued that there were currently three main pro-democracy groups in China:

-- "techies," to include bloggers and hackers (note: Zhao, a well-known blogger and media commentator who now teaches at a Guangdong Province university, has

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extensive ties to the "techie" community and was a participant in the recent fourth annual China Bloggers Conference held in November 2008 (ref A).);

-- "dissident writers" (note: According to Zhao, membership in PEN, an international association of writers promoting literature and freedom of expression, is a key indicator of this group.); and

-- "journalists" who work for outspoken, envelope-pushing "southern" newspapers like the Guangdong-based Southern Weekend (Nanfang Zhoumo) and Southern Metropolis Daily (Nanfang Dushi Bao), both of which are part of the Southern Daily Group that is run by the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee.

16. (C) Unfortunately, there was "little cross-over or communication between these three groups," Zhao said, adding that Charter 08 was a product primarily of the "dissident writers" faction and therefore probably did not represent the views of the "techie" or "journalist" groups. Zhao said that the high rate of PEN membership among drafters and signers of Charter 08 proved this point. (Note: Dissident writer Liu Xiaobo, a lead drafter of Charter 08 who was jailed soon after the document appeared, is a former president and current board member of the independent China chapter of PEN.)

"Revolutionary" Journalists

17. (C) Zhao, who recently began advising students at Shantou University's Journalism School in Guangdong Province, said he believed Chinese journalism "must professionalize." Zhao advocated American-style "objective journalism" and not European "opinion journalism," Taiwanese "ideological journalism," or Russian "state-run journalism." The big problem for Chinese civil society, Zhao argued, was an inability to "agree on the facts." Civil society activists would continue to fight among themselves, he said,

until an "objective recorder of facts" could emerge. Once factual journalism was established, civil society would "unite against the Party," he asserted. As an example, Zhao noted that Chinese civil society could not agree on the facts of the Tibetan situation, so people outside the Government constantly bickered among themselves instead of criticizing the Party on this issue.

18. (C) Chinese journalists were "the most liberal set of journalists in the world," Zhao averred, and "most Chinese journalists," except those working for the Xinhua News Agency or the People's Daily, were "anti-Party." This was because journalists have such an "adversarial relationship" with the Party's Propaganda Department, Zhao said, which "destroys their work on a daily basis." Zhao said many journalist friends he knew five years ago were now far more "revolutionary." The Internet in China should be used as a professional tool to provide an outlet for these journalists. Zhao said he was already working to create a community of journalists on-line modeled after the U.S.-based "China-Pol" list-serve popular among China watchers. (Note: Zhao himself is a member and regular contributor to China-Pol.)

Comment

19. (C) The conventional wisdom among Embassy contacts and many observers has been that Czechoslovakia's "Charter 77" was the key model for "Charter 08," as reflected in the similarity in names and spirit of the two documents. One Embassy contact recently cited criticism in China of Charter 08's "Western bias" and "obvious imitation of Charter 77," thereby making it "not applicable" to China. Zhao's comments noted above, citing additional inspiration from Taiwan's democracy movement three decades ago and reportedly based on his conversations with some Charter 08 drafters, are plausible, and demonstrate that the Charter 08 drafters likely took inspiration from multiple sources. Although many Embassy interlocutors, reflecting Mainland (and PRC Government) biases, have tended to be dismissive of Taiwan's "so-called democracy," other Embassy contacts argue (privately) that Taiwan, as the first "Chinese democracy," is an attractive and possibly more applicable political reform model for the PRC than

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Western liberal democracies would be.
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